Justification by Faith—Illustrated by Abram's Righteousness

A Sermon
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"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."—Genesis 15:6.

YOU will remember that last Lord's-day morning we spoke upon the calling of Abram, and the faith by which he was enabled to enter upon that separated life at the bidding of the Most High. We shall today pass from the consideration of his calling to that of his justification, that being most remarkably next in order in his history, as it is in point of theology in the New Testament; for, "whom he called, them he also justified."

Referring to the chapter before us for a preface to our subject, note that after Abram's calling his faith proved to be of the most practical kind. Being called to separate himself from his kindred and from his country, he did not therefore become a recluse, a man of ascetic habits, or a sentimentalist, unfit for the battles of ordinary life—no; but in the noblest style of true manliness he showed himself able to endure the household trouble and the public trial which awaited him. Lot's herdsmen quarrelled with the servants of Abram, and Abram with great disinterestedness gave his younger and far inferior relative the choice of pasturage, and gave up the well-watered plain of Sodom, which was the best of the land. A little while after, the grand old man who trusted in his God showed that he could play the soldier, and fight right gloriously against terrible odds. He gathered together his own household servants, and accepted the help of his neighbours, and pursued the conquering hosts of the allied kings, and smote them with as heavy a hand as if from his youth up he had been a military man. Brethren, this every-day life faith is the faith of God's elect. There are persons who imagine saving faith to be a barren conviction of the truth of certain abstract propositions, leading only to a quiet contemplation upon certain delightful topics, or a separating ourselves from all sympathy with our fellow creatures; but it is not so. Faith, restricted merely to religious exercise, is not Christian faith, it must show itself in everything. A merely religious faith may be the choice of men whose heads are softer than their hearts, fitter for cloisters than markets; but the manly faith which God would have us cultivate, is a grand practical principle adapted for every day in the week, helping us to rule our household in the fear of God, and to enter upon life's rough conflicts in the warehouse, the farm, or the exchange. I mention this at the commencement of this discourse, because as this is the

faith which came of Abram's calling, so also does it shine in his justification, and is, indeed, that which God counted unto him for righteousness.

Yet the first verse shows us that even such a believer as Abram needed comfort. The Lord said to him, "Fear not." Why did Abram fear? Partly because of the reaction which is always caused by excitement when it is over. He had fought boldly and conquered gloriously, and now he fears. Cowards tremble before the fight, and brave men after the victory. Elias slew the priests of Baal without fear, but after all was over, his spirit sank and he fled from the face of Jezebel. Abram's fear also originated in an overwhelming awe in the presence of God. The word of Jehovah came to him with power, and he felt that same prostration of spirit which made the beloved John fall at the feet of his Lord in the Isle of Patmos, and made Daniel feel, on banks of Hiddekel that there was no strength in him. "Fear not," said the Lord to the patriarch. His spirit was too deeply bowed. God would uplift his beloved servant into the power of exercising sacred familiarity. Ah, brethren, this is a blessed fear—let us cultivate it; for until it shall be cast out by perfect love, which is better still, we may be content to let this good thing rule our hearts. Should not a man, conscious of great infirmities, sink low in his own esteem in proportion as he is honoured with communion with the glorious Lord?

When he was comforted, Abram received on open declaration of his justification. I take it, beloved friends, that our text does not intend to teach us that Abram was not justified before this time. Faith always justifies whenever it exists, and as soon as it is exercised; its result follows immediately, and is not an aftergrowth needing months of delay. The moment a man truly trusts his God he is justified. Yet many are justified who do not know their happy condition; to whom as yet the blessing of justification has not been opened up in its excellency and abundance of privilege. There may be some of you here today who have been called by grace from darkness into marvellous light; you have been led to look to Jesus, and you believe you have received pardon of your sin, and yet, for want of knowledge, you know little of the sweet meaning of such words as these, "Accepted in the Beloved," "Perfect in Christ Jesus," "Complete in him." You *are* doubtless justified, though you scarcely understand what justification means; and you are accepted, though you have not realized your acceptance; and you are complete in Jesus Christ, though you have today a far deeper sense of your personal incompleteness than of the all-sufficiency of Jesus. A man may be entitled to property though he cannot read the title-deeds, or has not as yet heard of their existence; the law recognizes right and fact, not our apprehension thereof. But there will come a time, beloved, when you who are called will clearly realize your justification, and will rejoice in it; it shall be intelligently understood by you, and shall become a matter of transporting delight, lifting you to a higher platform of experience, and enabling you to walk with a firmer step, sing with a merrier voice, and triumph with an enlarged heart.

I intend now, as God may help me, first to note *the means of Abram's justification;* then, secondly, *the object of the faith which justified him;* and then, thirdly, *the attendants of his justification.*

I. First, brethren, HOW WAS ABRAM JUSTIFIED?

We see in the text the great truth, which Paul so clearly brings out in the fourth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, that Abram was *not justified by his works.* Many had been the good works of Abram. It was a good work to leave his country and his father's house at God's bidding; it was a good work to separate from Lot in so noble a spirit; it was a good work to follow after the robber-kings with undaunted courage; it was a grand work to refuse to take the spoils of Sodom, but to lift up his hand to God that he would not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet; it was a holy work to give to Melchisedec tithes of all that he possessed, and to worship the Most High God; yet none of these are mentioned in the text, nor is there a hint given of any other sacred duties as the ground or cause, or part cause of his justification before God. No, it is said, "He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness." Surely, brethren, if Abram, after years of holy living, is not justified by his works, but is accepted before God on account of his faith, much more must this be the case with the ungodly sinner who, having lived in unrighteousness, yet believeth on Jesus and is saved. If there be salvation for the dying thief, and others like him, it cannot be of debt, but of grace, seeing they have no good works. If Abram, when full of good works, is not justified by them, but by his faith, how much more we, being full of imperfections, must come unto the throne of the heavenly grace and ask that we may be justified by faith which is in Christ Jesus, and saved by the free mercy of God!

Further, this justification came to Abram *not by obedience to the ceremonial law* any more than by conformity to the moral law. As the apostle has so plainly pointed out to us, Abram was justified before he was circumcised. The initiatory step into the outward and visible covenant, so far as it was ceremonial, had not yet been taken, and yet the man was perfectly justified. All that follows after cannot contribute to a thing which is already perfect. Abram, being already justified, cannot owe that justification to his subsequent circumcision—this is clear enough; and so, beloved, at this moment, if you and I are to be justified, these two things are certain: it cannot be by the works of the moral law; it cannot be by obedience to any ceremonial law, be it what it may—whether the sacred ritual given to Aaron, or the superstitious ritual which claims to have been ordained by gradual tradition in the Christian church. If we be indeed the children of faithful Abraham, and are to be justified in Abraham's way, it cannot be by submission to rites or ceremonies of any kind. Hearken to this carefully, ye who would be justified before God: baptism is in itself an excellent ordinance, but it cannot justify nor help to justify us; confirmation is a mere figment of men, and could not, even if commanded by God, assist in justification; and the Lord's-supper, albeit that it is a divine institution, cannot in any respect whatsoever minister to

your acceptance or to your righteousness before God. Abram had no ceremonial in which to rest; he was righteous through his faith, and righteous only through his faith; and so must you and I be if we are ever to stand as righteous before God at all. Faith in Abram's case was the alone and unsupported cause of his being accounted righteous, for note, although in other cases Abram's faith produced works, and although in every case where faith is genuine it produces good works, yet the particular instance of faith recorded in this chapter was unattended by any works. For God brought him forth under the star-lit heavens, and bade him look up. "So shall thy seed be," said the sacred voice. Abram did what? Believed the promise—that was all. It was before he had offered sacrifice, before he had said a holy word or performed a single action of any kind that the word immediately and instanter went forth, "He believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Always distinguish between the truth, that living faith always produces works; and the lie, that faith and works co-operate to justify the soul. We are made righteous only by an act of faith in the work of Jesus Christ. That faith, if true, always produces holiness of life, but our being righteous before God is not because of our holiness in life in any degree or respect, but simply because of our faith in the divine promise. Thus saith the inspired apostle: "His faith was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

I would have you note that *the faith which justified Abram was still an imperfect faith,* although it perfectly justified him. It was imperfect beforehand, for he had prevaricated as to his wife, and bidden Sarai, "Say thou art my sister." It was imperfect after it had justified him, for in the next chapter we find him taking Hagar, his wife's handmaid, in order to effect the divine purpose, and so showing a want of confidence in the working of the Lord. It is a blessing for you and for me that we do not need perfect faith to save us. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove." If thou hast but the faith of a little child, it shall save thee. Though thy faith be not always at the same pitch as the patriarch's when he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, yet if it be simple and true, if it confide alone in the promise of God—it is an unhappy thing that it is no stronger, and thou oughtest daily to pray, "Lord, increase my faith"—but still it shall justify thee through Christ Jesus. A trembling hand may grasp the cup which bears a healing draught to the lip—the weakness of the hand shall not lessen the power of the medicine.

So far, then, all is clear, Abram was not justified by works, nor by ceremonies, nor partly by works, and partly by faith, nor by the perfection of his faith—he is counted righteous simply because of his faith in the divine promise.

I must confess that, looking more closely into it, this text is too deep for me, and therefore I decline, at this present moment, to enter into the controversy which rages around it; but one thing is clear to me, that if faith be, as we are told, counted to us for righteousness, it is not because faith in itself has merit which may make it a fitting substitute for a perfect obedience to the law of God, nor can it be viewed as a substitute for such obedience. For, brethren, all good acts are a duty: to trust God is our duty, and he that hath believed to his utmost hath done no more than it was his duty to have done. He who should believe without imperfection, if this were possible, would even then have only given to God a part of the obedience due; and if he should have failed, in love, or reverence, or aught beside, his faith, as a virtue and a work, could not stand him in any stead. In fact, according to the great principle of the New Testament, even faith, as a work, does not justify the soul. We are not saved by works at all or in any sense, but alone by grace, and the way in which faith saves us is not by itself as a work, but in some other way directly opposite thereto.

Faith cannot be its own righteousness, for it is of the very nature of faith to look out of self to Christ. If any man should say, "My faith is my righteousness," then it is evident that he is confiding in his faith; but this is just the thing of all others which it would be unsafe to do, for we must look altogether away from ourselves to Christ alone, or we have no true faith at all. Faith must look to the atonement and work of Jesus, or else she is not the faith of Scripture. Therefore to say that faith in and of itself becomes our righteousness, is, it seems to me, to tear out the very bowels of the gospel, and to deny the faith which has been once delivered to the saints. Paul declares, contrary to certain sectaries who rail against imputed righteousness—that we are justified and made righteous by the righteousness of Christ; on this he is plain and positive. He tells us (Romans 5:19) that, "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." The Old Testament verse before us as a text this morning, gives us but as it were the outward aspect of justification; it is brought to us by faith, and the fact that a man has faith entitles him to be set down as a righteous man; in this sense God accounts faith to a man as righteousness, but the underlying and secret truth which the Old Testament does not so clearly give us is found in the New Testament declaration, that we are accepted in the Beloved, and justified because of the obedience of Christ. Faith justifies, but not in and by itself, but because it grasps the obedience of Christ. "As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so *by the righteousness of one* the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." To the same effect is that verse in the second epistle general of Peter (first chapter, first verse), which runs in our version as follows: "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Now, everybody who is at all familiar with the original knows that the correct translation is "through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ." The righteousness which belongs to

the Christian is the righteousness of our God and Saviour, who is "made of God unto us righteousness." Hence the beauty of the old prophetic title of the Messiah, "The Lord our Righteousness." I do not wish to enter into controversy as to imputed righteousness this morning, we may discuss that doctrine another time; but we feel confident that this text cannot mean that faith in itself, as a grace or a virtue, becomes the righteousness of any man. The fact is, that faith is counted to us for righteousness because she has Christ in her hand; she comes to God resting upon what Christ has done, depending alone upon the propitiation which God has set forth; and God, therefore, writes down every believing man as being a righteous man, not because of what he is in himself, but for what he is in Christ. He may have a thousand sins, yet shall he be righteous if he have faith. He may painfully transgress like Samson, he may be as much in the dark as Jephtha, he may fall as David, he may slip like Noah; but, for all that, if he have a true and living faith, he is written down among the justified, and God accepteth him. While there be some who gloat over the faults of believers, God spieth out the pure gem of faith gleaming on their breast; he takes them for what they want to be, for what they are in heart, for what they would be if they could; and covering their sins with the atoning blood, and adorning their persons with the righteousness of the Beloved, he accepts them, seeing he beholds in them the faith which is the mark of the righteous man wherever it may be.

II. Let us pass on to consider THE PROMISE UPON WHICH HIS FAITH RELIED when Abram was justified.

Abram's faith, like ours, rested upon *a promise received direct from God.* "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." Had this promise been spoken by any other, it would have been a subject of ridicule to the patriarch; but, taking it as from the lip of God, he accepts it, and relies upon it. Now, brethren, if you and I have true faith we accept the promise, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved" as being altogether divine. If such a declaration were made to us by the priests of Rome, or by any human being on his own authority, we could not think it true; but, inasmuch as it comes to us written in the sacred word as having been spoken by Jesus Christ himself, we lean upon it as not the word of man, but the word of God. Beloved, it may be a very simple remark to make, but after all it is needful, that we must be careful that our faith in the truth is fixed upon the fact that God has declared it to be true, and not upon the oratory or persuasion of any of our most honoured ministers or most respected acquaintances. If your faith standeth in the wisdom of man, it is probably a faith in man; it is only that faith which believes the promise because God spake it which is real faith in God. Note that and try your faith thereby.

In the next place, Abram's faith was *faith in a promise concerning the seed.* It was told him before that he should have a seed in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. He recognized in this the selfsame promise which was made to Eve at the gates of Paradise, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed." "Abraham saw my day," says our Lord, "he saw it and was glad." In this promise Abram saw the one seed, as saith the apostle in Galatians 3:16, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ." He saw Christ by the eye of faith, and then he saw the multitude that should believe in him, the seed of the father of the faithful. The faith which justifies the soul concerns itself about Christ and not concerning mere abstract truths. If your faith simply believeth this dogma and that, it saveth you not; but when your faith believes that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses; when your faith turns to God in human flesh and rests in him with its entire confidence, then it justifies you, for it is the faith of Abram. Dear hearer, have you such a faith as this? Is it faith in the promise of God? Is it faith that deals with Christ and looks alone to him?

Abram had faith in *a promise which it seemed impossible could ever be fulfilled.* A child was to be born of his own loins, but he was nearly a hundred years old, and Sarai also was said to be barren years before. His own body was now dead as it were, and Sarai, so far as childbearing was concerned, was equally so. The birth of a son could not happen unless the laws of nature were reversed; but he considered not these things, he put them all aside; he saw death written on the creature, but he accepted the power of life in the Creator, and he believed without hesitation. Now, beloved, the faith that justifies us must be of the same kind. It seems impossible that I should ever be saved; I cannot save myself; I see absolute death written upon the best hopes that spring of my holiest resolutions; "In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing;" I can do nothing; I am slain under the law; I am corrupt through my natural depravity; but yet for all this I believe that through the life of Jesus I shall live, and inherit the promised blessing. It is small faith to believe that God will save you when graces flourish in your heart, and evidences of salvation abound, but it is a grand faith to trust in Jesus in the teeth of all your sins, and notwithstanding the accusations of conscience. To believe in him that justifieth not merely the godly but *the ungodly* (Romans 4:5). To believe not in the Saviour of saints, but in the Saviour of sinners; and to believe that if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous; this is precious, and is counted unto us for righteousness.

This justifying faith was faith which dealt with *a wonderful promise, vase and sublime.* I imagine the patriarch standing beneath the starry sky, looking up to those innumerable orbs. He cannot count them. To his outward eye, long accustomed in the land of the Chaldees to midnight observation, the stars appeared more numerous than they would to an ordinary observer. He looked and looked again with elevated gaze, and the voice said, "So shall thy

seed be." Now he did not say, "Lord, if I may be the father of a clan, the progenitor of a tribe, I shall be well content; but it is not credible that countless hosts can ever come of my barren body." No, he believed the promise; he believed it just as it stood. I do not hear him saying, "It is too good to be true." No; God hath said it—and nothing is too good for God to do. The greater the grace of the promise, the more likely it is to have come from him, for good and perfect gifts come from the Father of Lights. Beloved, does your faith take the promise as it stands in its vastness, in its height, and depth, and length, and breadth? Canst thou believe that thou, a sinner, art nevertheless a child, a son, an heir, an heir of God, joint-heir with Christ Jesus? Canst thou believe that heaven is thine, with all its ecstacies of joy, eternity with its infinity of bliss, God with all his attributes of glory? Oh! This is the faith that justifies, far-reaching, wide-grasping faith, that diminishes not the word of promise, but accepts it as it stands. May we have more and more of this large-handed faith!

Once more, Abram showed faith in *the promise as made to himself.* Out of his own bowels a seed should come, and it was in *him* and in his seed that the whole world should be blessed. I can believe all the promises in regard to other people. I find faith in regard to my dear friend to be a very easy matter, but oh! When it comes to close grips, and to laying hold for yourself, here is the difficulty. I could see my friend in ten troubles, and believe that the Lord would not forsake him. I could read a saintly biography, and finding that the Lord never failed his servant when he went through fire and through water, I do not wonder at it; but when it comes to one's own self, the wonder begins. Our heart cries, "Whence is this to me? What am I, and what my father's house, that such mercy should be mine? *I* washed in blood and made whiter than snow today! Is it so? *Can* it be? *I* made righteous, through my faith in Jesus Christ, perfectly righteous! O can it be? What! For me the everlasting love of God, streaming from its perennial fountain? For me the protection of a special providence in this life, and the provision of a prepared heaven in the life to come? For me a harp, a crown, a palm branch, a throne! For me the bliss of for ever beholding the face of Jesus, and being made like to him, and reigning with him! It seems impossible. And yet this is the faith that we must have, the faith which lays on Christ Jesus for itself, saying with the apostle, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." This is the faith which justifies; let us seek more and more of it, and God shall have glory through it.

III. In the third place, let us notice THE ATTENDANTS OF ABRAM'S JUSTIFICATION.

With your Bibles open, kindly observe that after it is written his faith was counted to him for righteousness, it is recorded that the Lord said to him, "I am Jehovah that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it." When the soul is graciously enabled to perceive its complete justification by faith, then *it more distinctly discerns its calling.* Now, the believer perceives his privileged separation and discerns why he was convinced of sin, why he was led away from self-righteousness and the pleasures of this world,

to live the life of faith; now he sees his high calling and the prize of it, and from the one blessing of justification he argues the blessedness of all the inheritance to which he is called. The more clear a man is about his justification the more will he prize his calling, and the more earnestly will he seek to make it sure by perfecting his separation from the world and his conformity to his Lord. Am I a justified man? Then will I not go back to that bondage in which I once was held. Am I now accepted of God through faith? Then will I live no longer by sight, as I once did as a carnal man, when I understood not the power of trusting in the unseen God. One Christian grace helps another, and one act of divine grace casts a refulgence upon another. Calling gleams with double glory side by side with the twin star of justification.

Justifying faith receives more vividly the promises. "I have brought thee," said the Lord, "into this land to inherit it." He was reminded again of the promise God made him years before. Beloved, no man reads the promises of God with such delight and with such a clear understanding as the man who is justified by faith in Christ Jesus. "For now," saith he, "this promise is mine, and made to me. I have the pledge of its fulfillment in the fact that I walk in the favour of God. I am no longer obnoxious to his wrath; none can lay anything to my charge, for I am absolved through Jesus Christ; and, therefore, if when I was a sinner he justified me, much more, being justified, will he keep his promise to me. If when I was a rebel condemned, he nevertheless in his eternal mercy called me and brought me into this state of acceptance, much more will he preserve me from all my enemies, and give me the heritage which he has promised by his covenant of grace. A clear view of justification helps you much in grasping the promise, therefore seek it earnestly for your soul's comfort.

Abram, after being justified by faith, was *led more distinctly to behold the power of sacrifice.* By God's command he killed three bullocks, three goats, three sheep, with turtle doves and pigeons, being all the creatures ordained for sacrifice. The patriarch's hands are stained with blood; he handles the butcher's knife, he divides the beasts, he kills the birds he places them in an order revealed to him by God's Spirit at the time; there they are. Abram learns that there is no meeting with God except through sacrifice. God has shut every door except that over which the blood is sprinkled. All acceptable approaches to God must be through an atoning sacrifice, and Abram sees this. While the promise is still in his ears, while the ink is yet wet in the pen of the Holy Spirit, writing him down as justified, he must see a sacrifice, and see it, too, in emblems which comprehend all the revelation of sacrifice made to Aaron. So, brethren, it is a blessed thing when your faith justifies you, if it helps you to obtain more complete and vivid views of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The purest and most bracing air for faith to breathe is on Calvary. I do not wonder that your faith grows weak when you fail to consider well the tremendous sacrifice which Jesus made for his people. Turn to the annals of the Redeemer's sufferings given us in the Evangelists; bow yourself in prayer before the Lamb of God, blush to think you should have forgotten his

death, which is the centre of all history; contemplate the wondrous transaction of substitution once again, and you will find your faith revived. It is not the study of theology, it is not reading books upon points of controversy, it is not searching into mysterious prophecy which will bless your soul, it is looking to Jesus crucified. That is the essential nutriment of the life of faith, and mind that you keep to it. As a man already justified, Abram looked at the sacrifice, all day long and till the sun went down, chasing away the birds of prey as you must drive off all disturbing thoughts. So must you also study the Lord Jesus, and view him in all his characters and offices, be not satisfied except you grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Perhaps even more important was the next lesson which Abram had to learn. He was led to behold *the covenant.* I suppose that these pieces of the bullock, the lamb, the ram, and the goat, were so placed that Abram stood in the midst with a part on this side and a part on that. So he stood as a worshipper all through the day, and towards nightfall, when a horror of great darkness came over him, he fell into a deep sleep. Who would not feel a horror passing over him as he sees the great sacrifice for sin, and sees himself involved therein? There in the midst of the sacrifice he saw, moving with solemn motion, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, answering to the pillar of cloud and fire, which manifested the presence in later days to Israel in the wilderness. In these emblems the Lord passed between the pieces of the sacrifice to meet his servant, and enter into covenant with him. This has always been the most solemn of all modes of covenanting; and has even been adopted in heathen nations on occasions of unusual solemnity. The sacrifice is divided and the covenanting parties meet between the divided pieces. The profane interpretation was, that they imprecated upon each other the curse that if they broke the covenant they might be cut in pieces as these beasts had been; but this is not the interpretation which our hearts delight in. It is this. It is only in the midst of the sacrifice that God can enter into a covenant relationship with sinful man. God cometh in his glory like a flame of fire, but subdued and tempered to us as with a cloud of smoke in the person of Jesus Christ; and he comes through the bloody sacrifice which has been offered once for all through Jesus Christ on the tree. Man meets with God in the midst of the sacrifice of Christ. Now, beloved, you who are justified, try this morning to reach this privilege which particularly belongs to you at this juncture of your spiritual history. Know and understand that God is in covenant bonds with you. He has made a covenant of grace with you which never can be broken: the sure mercies of David are your portion. After this sort does that covenant run, "A new heart also will I give them, and a right spirit will I put within them. They shall be my people, and I will be their God." That covenant is made with you over the slaughtered body of the Son of God. God and you cross hands over him who sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. The Lord accepts us, and we enter with him into sacred league and amity, over the victim whose wounds and death ratify the compact. Can God forget a covenant with such

sanctions? Can such a federal bond so solemnly sealed be ever broken? Impossible. Man is sometimes faithful to his oath, but God is always so; and when that oath is confirmed for the strengthening of our faith by the blood of the Only-begotten, to doubt is treason and blasphemy. God help us, being justified, to have faith in the covenant which is sealed and ratified with blood.

Immediately after, God made to Abram (and here the analogy still holds) *a discovery,* that all the blessing that was promised, though it was surely his, would not come without an interval of trouble. "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years." When a man is first of all brought to Christ he often is so ignorant as to think, "Now my troubles are all over; I have come to Christ and I am saved: from this day forward I shall have nothing to do but to sing the praises of God." Alas! A conflict remains. We must know of a surety that the battle now begins. How often does it happen that the Lord, in order to educate his child for future trouble, makes the occasion when his justification is most clear to him the season of informing him that he may expect to meet with trouble! I was struck with that fact when I was reading for my own comfort the other night the fifth chapter of Romans; it runs thus— "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." See how softly it flows, a justification sheds the oil of joy upon the believer's head. But what is the next verse— "and not only so, but we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience," and so on. Justification ensures tribulation. Oh! Yes, the covenant is yours; you shall possess the goodly land and Lebanon, but, like all the seed of Abraham, you must go down into Egypt and groan, being burdened. All the saints must smart before they sing; they must carry the cross before they wear the crown. You are a justified man, but you are not freed from trouble. Your sins were laid on Christ, but you still have Christ's cross to carry. The Lord has exempted you from the curse, but he has not exempted you from the chastisement. Learn that you enter on the children's discipline on the very day in which you enter upon their accepted condition.

To close the whole, the Lord gave to Abram *an assurance of ultimate success.* He would bring his seed into the promised land, and the people who had oppressed them he would judge. So let it come as a sweet revelation to every believing man this morning, that at the end he shall triumph, and those evils which now oppress him shall be cast beneath his feet. The Lord shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly. We may be slaves in Egypt for awhile, but we shall come up out of it with great abundance of true riches, better than silver or gold. We shall be prospered by our tribulations, and enriched by our trials. Therefore, let us be of good cheer. If sin be pardoned, we may well bear affliction. "Strike, Lord," said Luther, "now my sins are gone; strike as hard as thou wilt if transgression be covered." These light afflictions which are but for a moment, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which

shall be revealed in us. Let us make it the first point of our care to be justified with Abraham's seed, and then whether we sojourn in Egypt or enjoy the peace of Canaan, it little matters: we are all safe if we are only justified by faith which is in Christ Jesus. Dear friends, this last word, and I send you home. Have you believed in God? Have you trusted Christ? O that you would do so today! To believe that God speaks truth ought not to be hard; and if we were not very wicked this would never need to be urged upon us, we should do it naturally. To believe that Christ is able to save us seems to me to be easy enough, and it would be if our hearts were not so hard. Believe thy God, man, and think it no little thing to do so. May the Holy Ghost lead thee to a true trust. This is the work of God, that ye believe on Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. Believe that the Son of God can save, and confide thyself alone in him, and he will save thee. He asks nothing but faith, and even this he gives thee; and if thou hast it, all thy doubts and sins, thy trials and troubles put together, shall not shut thee out of heaven. God shall fulfil his promise, and surely bring thee in to possess the land which floweth with milk and honey.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis 15 and Romans 4.